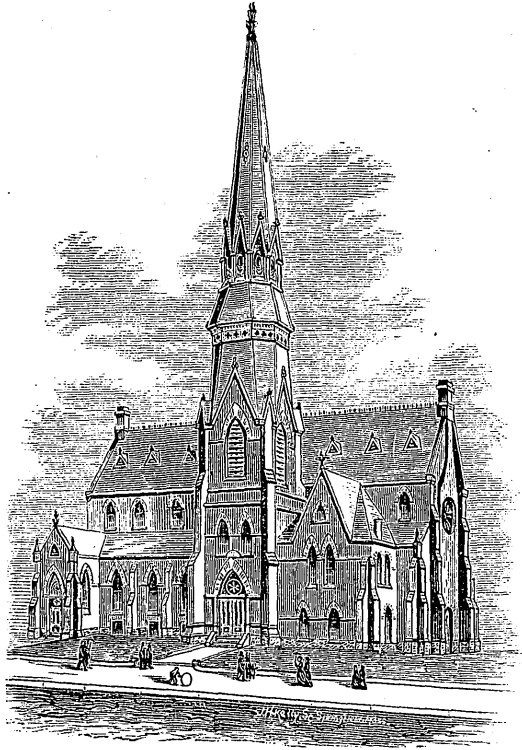


«The Two Bands»



State Street Baptist Church,

Springfield, Mass.

—|| The Two Bands ||—

A SERMON

PREACHED BY

REV. W. *William* H. *Holmes* P. FAUNCE, 1859-1

IN THE

STATE STREET BAPTIST CHURCH,

Springfield, Dec. 12, 1886.

On the Occasion of the Dismissal of One Hundred and Two
Members to Form the Highland Baptist Church.

Springfield, Mass. :

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1887.



THE STATE STREET BAPTIST CHURCH held a very important meeting, December 10, 1886, in the vestry of their house of worship. The purpose of the meeting was to formally sever the connection of 102 members, living on the hill, who go out to form the new Highland Baptist Church, and take possession of the Highland Chapel, on the corner of State and Stebbins Streets. The faces of all beamed with joy as they came together on this occasion, at the thought of service done for the Master and at its results, while tears, by force restrained, were pressing hard for an outlet from many an eye when the thought came: "To-night we go out and leave the old home, the old workers, the old familiar scenes and the pastor,—all of which have been dear to our hearts and almost the idol of our Christian life."

This is the second colony which the State Street Baptist Church has sent from its crowded hive. The other was of 75 members, who founded the West Springfield Church, and the church itself, founded but 22 years ago by 121 members of the First Church, has to-day, after these two drains, 691 members.

The exercises began with a few words by the pastor, Rev. W. H. P. Faunce, whom the Hill people reluctantly leave. The spacious rooms of the vestry were crowded. Then there were prayers by several of the brethren; the congregation sang, "Blest be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love;" and the choir sang three anthems, one being "No evil shall befall thee," from the oratorio of "Eli." The 102 names were read. Then E. F. Foster, the clerk of the church, moved that they be given letters of dismissal to found the Highland Baptist Church. It was seconded and carried. Then the members who were about to leave spoke feelingly and fittingly, and tears in many eyes testified the sorrow and regret of severing the closest ties of Christian fellowship. Maj. Brewster, Mr. Maynard, Rawson Hathaway, J. D. Parsons and Rev. Mr. Goodspeed spoke, followed by prayer by the pastor. For an hour or more after the meeting the people crowded the rooms for a happy social gathering, the last of the kind as State Street Baptist people.

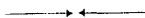
E. F. FOSTER, *Clerk.*

PREFATORY NOTE.

To the eye of a stranger the following sermon, prepared with no thought of printing, will appear of small value. It is not an exposition of any Christian truth, but simply a personal talk with my own people, and whatever force it may have had originally, was derived chiefly from the occasion on which it was delivered. In order that this occasion may be preserved in memory and the duties arising from it may be more fully realized by every member of the church, I yield to the request for publication.

W. H. P. F.

SERMON.



GENESIS XXXII. 10: *With my staff I passed over this Jordan, and now I am become two bands.*

The true use of looking backward is to go forward. Lot's wife looked back because she wanted to go back, and she became a pillar of salt. The man who wants to go back always becomes bitter. Some men are always telling us that there were giants in days that are past, and that the men of to-day are pigmies. They tell us of the battles fought in the brave days of old, and seem to think that modern soldiers are only carpet-knights. They seem to think that if the glass of time could be reversed and the sands made to run backward, the millennium would quickly arrive. Thus the past, which ought to be our greatest inspiration, serves only to discourage and paralyze the present.

It is a common but shallow saying that history repeats itself. But a poor world this would be, if, like a barrel-organ, it must forever play over the same old tunes. God never repeats himself, and history is but the expression of God's thought. As no two objects in space are alike, so no two events in time are alike. You may turn a common kaleidoscope all day without reproducing a single figure. In the kaleidoscope are only a dozen bits of glass. But in human history there are millions of pieces, and the combinations are infinite. This is the distinction between man and brute or insect. The bee builds its cell, and the beaver its dam, and the bird its nest, precisely as they did five

thousand years ago. They are satisfied. But man, always unsatisfied, is always reaching out after the highest, even God. Those striking coincidences in human history which we call repetitions simply indicate that life is a spiral, ever returning on itself, but ever rising higher. In ascending Bunker Hill Monument, one enters at the side and mounts a winding stair-case. He is constantly returning to the side of the monument from which he started, though each time on a higher level. True life is not a circle. Human history never repeats itself. As life ever returns on itself, let us see to it that each revolution marks a higher level, an expanding horizon, and a nearer approach to the sky.

This spiral motion was the experience of Jacob. In the tent we find him encamped near the Jordan. He was returning to his father's house, after twenty years spent in the land of Mesopotamia. Twenty years ago he had crossed that river, a poor man, with only a staff in his hand. Now he was returning, a rich and powerful chieftain. He had left home, crowded out by his elder brother, and gone to a strange country and people. He had set out with only a stick and a bag of provisions; but he was returning with such flocks and herds and such a retinue of servants that they formed two bands, either of which would have made any man proud and happy. More than that: Jacob's own character was changed. He had started out a fickle and deceitful man, called Jacob—"the supplanter." Now he was given the name of Israel, i. e., "soldier of God." He had started out as a timid man who loved to linger round the hearthstone. He was coming back a brave man who dared to wrestle with an angel by night. Those twenty years had done much for Jacob. They had brought him both wisdom and wealth. There was no circle in his life. He recalled the night when, twenty years before, he had slept by the winding river; and the thought of what God had done for him in those twenty years suffused his heart with gratitude. He knelt down and cried: "O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the

truth which thou hast showed unto thy servant; for with my staff only I passed over this Jordan, and now I am become two bands."

Brethren, perhaps I need say nothing more. It seems as if, remembering the condition of this church at this time, I need only point you to this verse and the sermon would preach itself. Twenty-two years ago, you came out from the parent church and founded this church; now you have become the parent and are sending forth the daughter. Has not God led this church as clearly as he led Jacob of old? I wish that some one were here who knows your history and might fittingly speak of it. When in one year the Bible School increased from one hundred and thirty-seven to four hundred and forty-five scholars, was it not obvious that God had called you to go forth? From the inception of the enterprise, did not God's blessing fall in showers upon you? He gave you some members of almost unparalleled devotion. He directed you to a pastor whose qualifications for this work were peculiar and extraordinary, a man who affects all whom he touches like an electric battery. From the first meeting of the church until now, a strange and beautiful harmony has marked your progress. The church has been strongly democratic, and the will of the majority has never been opposed. In financial strength you have steadily increased until the present year, when, with no millionaires among us, our expenditures have exceeded those of any other church in the city. In number you have increased until you stand among the five largest Baptist churches in the Commonwealth. This has been a spiritual church. The gift of the Spirit has sometimes been like a mighty wind sweeping over the congregation; sometimes, as now, like the gentle dew from heaven. Our purpose has not been to establish a literary society or a social club, but to advance the kingdom of Christ—to become more Christ-like ourselves, and to bring men to his feet. Under God, that purpose has been largely accomplished. We do not appreciate our church. We are busy men. We so seldom journey to other cities, that we do not by comparison learn the value

of our church home. Not one of us appreciates this church. May God keep us from the appreciation which is spiritual pride, but may he give us that appreciation which is humble, grateful recognition of his infinite loving-kindness! Unless we are grateful for the past, we can not ask for any further blessing. The church that is not thankful for what God has done is not fitted to receive any thing more. You, who went through the early days, recall them now! Recall the time when the corner-stone of this building was laid. Recall the time when with rejoicing you entered the lecture-room below, when you purchased through great self-denial the organ which now leads our service of song, when you went into the highways and hedges to gather men and women into this church. Recall the times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord; ay, recall the time when some of you stood up in the room below and opened your hearts to Christ. How much has this church been worth to you?—what would you take for your hope in the Saviour of men? How much was the conversion of your family worth to you? Can we not say: “I will sing unto the Lord, for he hath dealt bountifully with me.”

And now we have become “two bands.” Last Friday evening, the action was taken, and one hundred names were struck from our roll. To some of you, this may seem a doubtful blessing. Would it not have been better to continue under one roof, to hold our present strength and increase it? That is a fair question, and a question that only the future can fully answer. But one feature of this work deserves our attention as we look back. The building of the Chapel has not been at the solicitation of any officer in the church, or any party in the church. It has been the result of an impression gradually shaping itself through a long series of years, an impression of duty, an impression for which we shall find it hard to account if it be not the voice of God in our hearts. When I came here, I found a dim, restless feeling, as if the church realized it had not fully entered its opportunity. As that feeling has gradually become action, I have felt like the man in a woolen mill

tending a loom. He does not weave the cloth, he does not even choose the pattern. His only business is to keep the moving threads from tangling, to mend them when broken, and to guide a power beyond his own. In no other work in which I am engaged have I felt so impersonal, so truly as if my preferences were out of the question as in the building of Highland Chapel. When did we decide to build? No man can answer. The decision of the society simply recorded the previous decision of the members. No one can tell how or when or why we came to such decision. Again and again the Chapel people have said to me: "Pastor, we have no leader. If some one man were at the head of this, we should feel safe." It may be that the absence of human leaders marks the reality of the divine direction! It is equally clear that this has not been the work of any party who were dissatisfied with the old church and could not be happy in it. All of those who have gone could still be happy with us, and to some the pain of separation is agony. Said one of them recently: "If I were a woman, I would sit down and cry." Said another: "There have been two great crosses in life for me to bear: one was when I became a Christian; the other, when I agreed to leave State Street Baptist Church." Now, when men go with a spirit like that, we must believe either that some tremendous delusion has gotten possession of them, some strange hallucination has blinded their judgment, or else that God is leading them. The enterprise has not been undertaken because of any dissatisfaction in the church, because of any party who wished to leave, because of any solicitation from without, or because of any sudden impulse of restlessness. Why was it undertaken? We can only answer that the conviction has been slowly shaping itself through a long series of years, until it has become so strong that, in support of that conviction, men are willing to do that which wrings the tears from their eyes. Nor from *their* eyes alone;—there are some of *us* who feel almost as if one of the walls of the church had been removed. We are to let go hands that we have clasped for years. We shall miss voices that have

strengthened us in many a stormy day. This is one more of the partings with which life is filled. They say that they shall see us often; that it is a nominal, not a real separation. Yet we know that as we see each other less, we shall slowly grow apart, and the growing apart of old friends is the saddest thing in life.

But some may say: "In union there is strength. Does not division produce weakness?" I answer: The division of a dead thing weakens it; the natural division of a living thing strengthens it. I have at home an English ivy that runs over my window and keeps its bright green, while the trees without are bare. And I find that ivy has a constant tendency, like an instinct, to start other ivies. Not content with producing leaves and keeping itself in good condition, it is bent on sending off new shoots that shall become like itself. Not self-preservation, but ivy-extension, is the principle of its being. In all living things, the same law holds. The tiny bird snatches the crumb from the street and flies to her nest. You may think the bird is very foolish. It might have all the food for itself. If it would not try to bring up new birds but simply strengthen itself, it might become the largest, plumpest bird in all the city. But then there would be no birds next year, and the bird might become so plump that it could not fly itself! Not self-preservation, but bird-extension, is the law of bird life.

What God has thus taught in nature he has written in the book. Not church-preservation, but church-extension is the law of church life. Of course, it is possible for the ivy to send off too many shoots and destroy itself. But exercising due care, let us remember we exist not for self, but for the world. When Christ was ascending from the slope of Olivet, he might have said: "Remain in Palestine until every man is converted to faith in me. Then you may advance with power on the heathen world." But he said: "Tarry ye in Jerusalem until ye receive power," until the church becomes a living thing, vitalized by the Spirit. Then divide, and go into all the world. It would have been wrong to go before they had received power;—it would have been wrong for them to stay after it. A selfish

church of one hundred members is one hundred times as bad as a selfish man. The church exists not for self alone, but for the cause of Christ. In this city only one church was occupying our largest and most rapidly growing district. If it was not the duty of this church to go there, whose duty was it? One-half the residents of the Hill are not regular attendants at any church. Surely it was the duty of some church to occupy this field of need and of promise. If it *was* our duty, God be thanked that we have not refused it. We all know of churches that have refused to enter open doors and afterward have found no place for repentance. As I have looked on this work, I have thought of the experience of Peter. He thought for a long time that he ought not to preach to the Gentiles, that his work was at home among the Jews. But when he saw the Holy Spirit given to the Gentiles also, he said: "What was I that I could withstand God?"

God bless those who go to form Highland Baptist Church! They go strong in numbers and strong in faith. Whatever our feeling hitherto may have been, since it is too late now to call them back, let our heartiest good wishes, our kindest words, our most generous deeds go with them! As we stand at the launching of the new ship, we say:

"Our hearts, our hopes are all with thee!
Our hearts, our hopes, our prayers, our tears,
Our faith, triumphant o'er our fears,
Are all with thee, are all with thee!"

And what of us who remain? That is for us to decide. That depends on us alone. I say, *on us alone*. God is the same, as willing to bless in the next twenty-two years as in the past. Whether we shall be in condition to receive that blessing, depends on ourselves.

Let us see to it that we never admit any thought of discouragement because of reduced forces. One hundred members have gone. Each member of this church represents, on the average, three in the congregation and Bible School. You will come to church on Sunday morning,

and, seeing a number of vacant sittings near you, or vacant seats in the Bible School, will say: "Our church is losing its hold on the community. A year ago, it was crowded; we could not offer seats to strangers. Now, we have more than room enough. We must have a new sexton, or choir, or pastor, or superintendent!" I trust that when present leaders are standing in the way, they will have grace to perceive it and depart; but perhaps *a new congregation* is the thing we need. Friends, never admit one thought of discouragement because our working forces are reduced. "Bate not a jot of heart or hope." To admit a thought of weakness is to become weak. To think ourselves strong is to be strong. Let no man's hand tremble, or his eye quail. When you went out of the old church, I have been told that the grand old hero who was leading all the Baptist forces of the city, said: "Now we are crippled; the life has gone out of our church." That bit of history, at least, shall not repeat itself. No man shall say that to-day. It was not true then; it is not true now. Let no diminution in numbers mark a diminution in faith. Gideon's army must be reduced before God could use it. It is not the length of our church roll, but our power with God and with men, that can give us success. It may be our reduction in numbers will be our greatest blessing. God blessed us richly after West Springfield was set off as a separate church. Passing recently along a forest road, a friend pointed out to me that the trees were tall and spindling, and worth little as timber. They were so closely crowded that no sunshine could reach their trunks and roots. No one of them had a fair chance. That may have been our condition here. We have been so closely crowded that the development of that strong Christian individuality, of those qualities which make leaders and heroes, has been hindered. When God takes out some of the trees, it may, I believe it will, result in a sturdier growth in those that remain.

Yet I will not conceal from you my grave concern as to what the coming year shall bring. The number of workers being reduced, unless each one remaining increases his

share, the work of the whole church must sink. About that there is no dispute. If one-fifth of the workmen in a mill are dismissed, yet the product of the mill is to remain the same, what must those who remain do? Are you willing that the product of our church should be any less in the coming year than in the past? Do you want to have this church lessen its hold on the community, its influence for good? There is only one way in which that calamity can be averted, and that is by an *increase of endeavor on the part of every one who remains*. We see that so clearly that we can not discuss it. The only question for each member is: "Will I increase my endeavor, my interest, my devotion to this church?" Dear brethren, will you in this very service ponder that question? Answer now your conscience and your God: Will you increase your effort here? On your answer hangs the future. You can make that future what you will. God give us, at the opening of 1887, a new sheet of paper, fresh from his hand, unwritten yet with any good or evil.

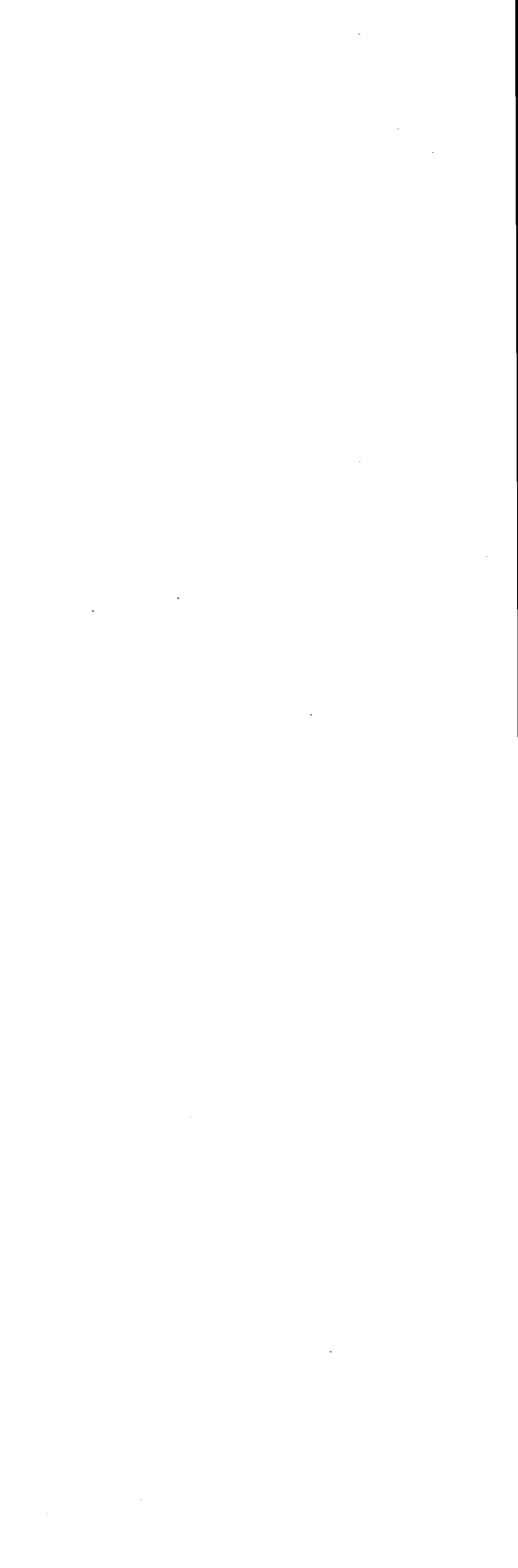
One hundred members have gone from our church: shall one hundred new ones come into it? There are people enough in our city—people who need just what we can give. No church has a better situation, a broader opportunity, than we. Multitudes pass our doors each day in the week. A broad entrance, a bright light, a pleasant church, invite them. But these are not enough. We must not sit in the church and say men can come if they will. We must go out, in obedience to Christ's command, and "compel them to come in." That verse has been interpreted in ages past to mean: "Compel them by fire and sword and rack; force them to come in." But there is a sweet compulsion that comes from a heart filled with the love of Christ,—a compulsion not of the whip, but of the magnet. It does not drive; it attracts. Jesus said: "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me." Then if Christ is in us, men will be drawn to us. When Christ is in the heart, there is power in the hand. "How shall we reach the masses?" is the cry to-day. How do you bring the sparrows to your window, on this wintry morning? You

throw open the window and scatter bread, and the sparrows come before you have dropped the sash. They want to come where they can be fed. If you throw out pebbles, you will not catch them more than once. If you offer bread, you can have them every morning. Friends, this world is a hungry world. If we in the church service and the prayer meeting have the bread of God to offer, men will come. The world finds out where it can be fed. No advertising, no "attraction," is quite equal to the attraction of bread.

Brethren, I ask your help. As I said when I came here, so I say again: This church will crush me, unless every brother stands beside me and puts his shoulder beneath it with me. It has been a happy time of service with me these last two years. Shall it be as happy in the days to come? It can not be, unless you heed this call. In some societies there are two classes of members, active and associate. I never divide the members of my church into such classes. I take it for granted that each one is active in some way. I simply ask each one to pray a little more, and work a little harder, and give us a few more evenings, and bring a few more friends into our services. Bring the children. The disciples thought the children would disturb Jesus. But he rebuked the disciples, and took the children for his text. Come yourself, and come from a closet of prayer. Then, when the hands of the pastor are weak and his courage falters and his words seem like idle tales, your faith will up-bear him and bring victory. Moses held up the rod over the field of battle, but Aaron and Hur held up Moses. Moses was needed, but Aaron and Hur were needed more. God has not done with this church yet. I believe in this church with all my heart. I believe in it because I believe in God. On every side I see grand possibilities, latent resources, promises of greater things. We shall die, but not the work. God's work is greater than any leader,—greater than any church. That work is as long as time, as wide as the world, as high as heaven. Bows of promise span the sky. Let us "onward unswerving," and the result is sure.

Like a mighty army,
 Moves the church of God ;
 Brothers, we are treading
 Where the saints have trod.
We are not divided,
All one body we ;
 One in hope and doctrine,
 One in charity.

Crowns and thrones may perish,
 Kingdoms rise and wane ;
 But the church of Jesus
 Constant shall remain.
 Gates of hell can never
 'Gainst that church prevail ;
 We have Christ's own promise,
 And that can not fail.





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